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SOOTY

an
ARISTOCRATIC CAT

BY

AMBROSINA HURCUM

PICTURES BY

ELEANOR MUSSEY YOUNG



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Sooty an Aristocratic Cat





Sooty

An Aristocratic Cat



by

AMBROSINA HURCUM

Pictures by

ELEANOR MUSSEY YOUNG

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SOOTY was a black kitten, so very tiny that when she ran she looked like a bit of fluff blowing about the floor.

The little kitten lived with old Miss Robinson. She had plenty of cream and meat to eat and the softest of cushions to lie upon. She also had a little gray cotton mouse to play with.

Sooty was an aristocratic cat, but she longed for another kitten or a nice little girl or boy to play with. There is not much fun in cream or meat or gray cotton mice when one has to enjoy them all alone.

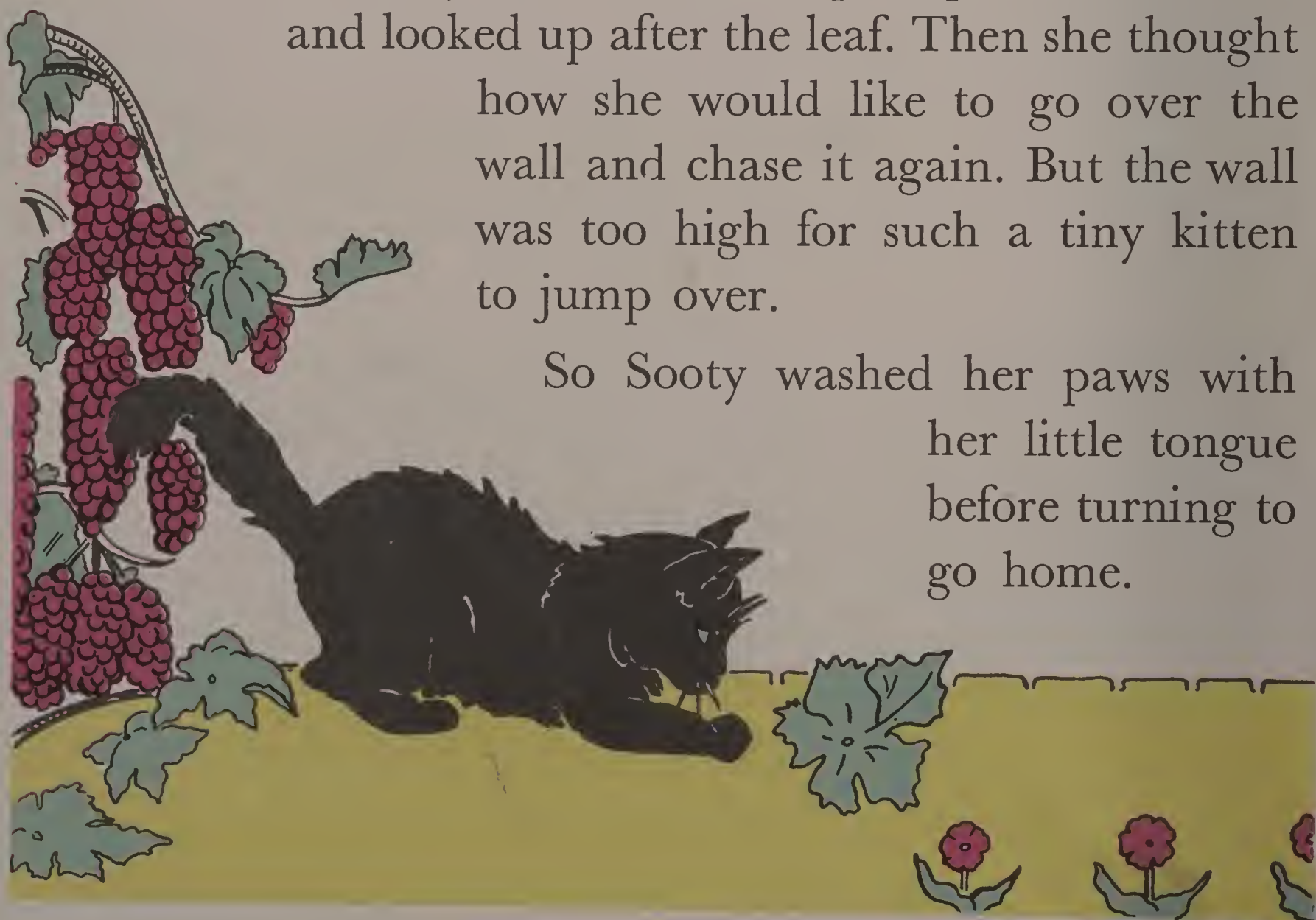
One day Sooty went out into the garden to enjoy the bright warm sunshine on her little fluffy back. She wandered lazily around for a time. Then a little puff of wind sent some leaves falling from the grape vine, where they were hanging rather loosely on their stems.

One leaf fluttered right in front of Sooty and made her jump. Then it slipped with the tiniest scraping sound along the garden path. After it went the tiny kitten. She leaped and frisked and chased, but she could not catch it. She stretched out her little paw but the leaf always slipped a little too far ahead for her to get it.

My! It was a merry chase. Down the garden path, out at the gate and down the lane went the leaf; and after it went Sooty. Then up came a bigger puff of wind and the leaf sailed high in the air and over a big wall.

Sooty sat down on her plump little haunches and looked up after the leaf. Then she thought how she would like to go over the wall and chase it again. But the wall was too high for such a tiny kitten to jump over.

So Sooty washed her paws with her little tongue before turning to go home.





A little puff of wind sent some leaves falling

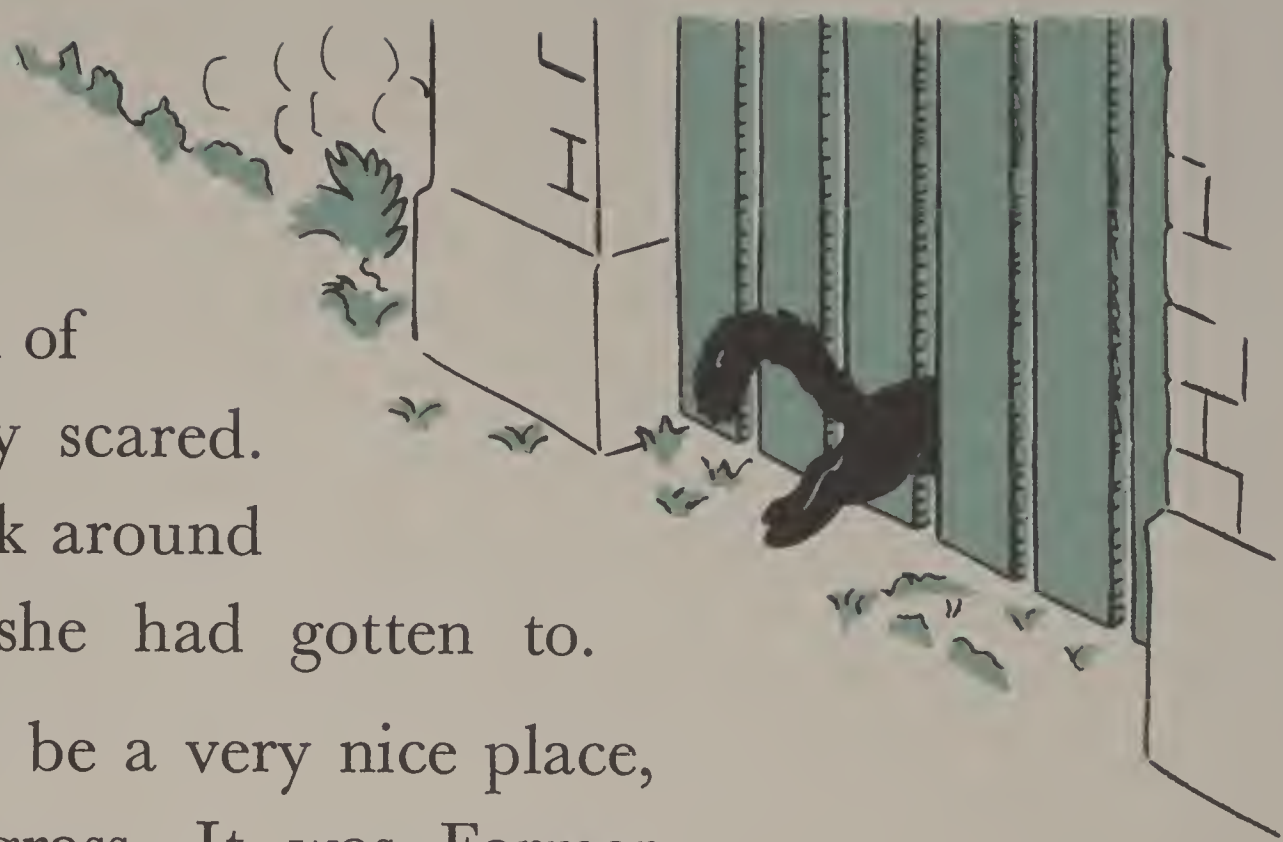
Before long a collie dog came wandering by. He was out for his afternoon walk. Sooty saw him and at once arched her back and raised her tail straight up in the air. She always felt very vexed and ruffled at the sight of a dog, though why she did not know, for no dog had ever hurt her and this one was most friendly-looking.

The dog stopped in his walk and glanced down at Sooty. Sooty scratched and spat at him in a most ugly manner. He backed off and barked gently at her, meaning to show her that he merely wanted a game. Sooty was so terribly frightened that she turned and started to run.

The big wall was broken by an iron gate and Sooty dashed in between two of the bars. She thought only of hiding from the dog. She darted behind the wall and waited, panting and trembling. When she found that the



dog did not appear she began to feel rather ashamed of being so easily scared. She took a look around to see where she had gotten to.



It seemed to be a very nice place, all trees and grass. It was Farmer Jones' orchard. There was a sweet smell of fruit in the air, for the apples and plums hung ripe on the big shady branches.

Sooty did not care much for fruit but she thought the trees very pretty. So she went up into a big one and started to sharpen her claws on the bark.

She was just thinking that she would walk around to see what was on the other side when a loud sound made her heart jump up into her throat. The sound was something like a rooster's cock-a-doodle-doo and something like a steam whistle.

She looked quickly around and there was something she had never seen before. It was bounding along under the trees making straight for her.

Now it was really only one of Farmer Jones' little girls but Sooty did not know that. She had heard Miss Robinson and some of her friends speak about children. But she had never seen any. Miss Robinson did not like children and never invited them to her house. Besides Sooty had never been allowed to wander around to get acquainted with anyone outside.

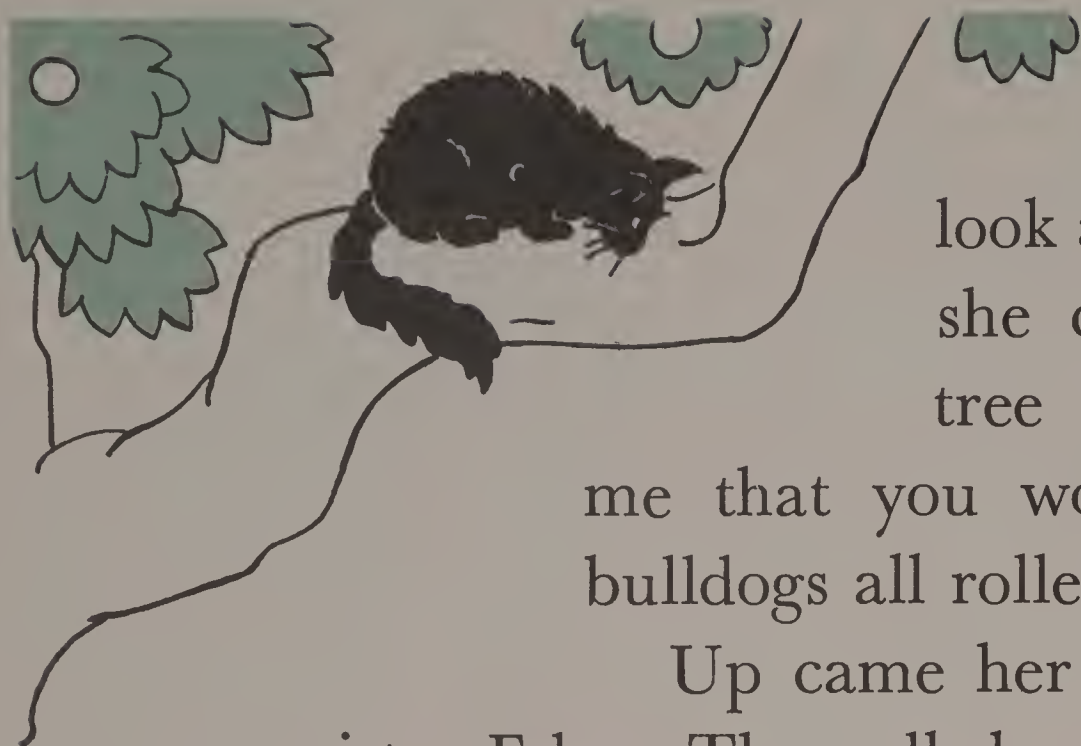
So she was terribly frightened as small animals always are at anything large and noisy that they do not understand. With the fur on her tail all fluffed out like a brush, she ran up the tree trunk and perched on a branch. She looked down at the little girl. Her great green eyes were wide open.

The little girl whose name was Poppy danced around and clapped her hands and laughed.





She started to sharpen her claws on the bark



“Come, Dick!
Edna! Come and
look at this darling kitten!”
she called. “It’s up in a
tree and it’s so scared of
me that you would think I was ten
bulldogs all rolled into one.”

Up came her brother Dick and her
sister Edna. They all danced up and down and
called to Sooty to come down. Their fox terrier whose
name was Jack, came rushing up. He too ran around and
jumped and barked until the din became so awful that
Sooty trembled more than ever with fright.

At last she began to realize that she was safe. The
children laughed so much and the fox terrier wagged his
tail so hard that only a very stupid little cat indeed could
have continued to think them unfriendly. So she stopped
trembling and opened her little pink mouth and said
“Meow.”

“Oh, the darling thing!” cried Poppy. “She wants to
come down. Stop yelling, Edna. Be quiet Jack; and Dick,
don’t shout so. I’m going to try to make her come.”

So Edna and Dick kept quiet. Dick held on to Jack
and told him to lie down. Poppy called softly and sweetly,
“Come on, kitty. Pretty kitty. Come and have some
milk.”

Sooty said “meow” again, so very wistfully that Edna and Poppy both cried out, “Oh, kitty dear!”

And Poppy added, “We just must get her down. Maybe she is hungry.”

“Well,” said Dick, “one of you take hold of Jack’s collar and I’ll go up after her. If I call softly to her as I go, maybe she won’t climb any farther up into the tree.”

Dick was always practical and sensible and the girls, even Edna who was a year older than he was, always relied very much upon him.

So Edna took hold of Jack and held him very tight, and Poppy stood calling softly to Sooty while Dick began climbing the tree. He called as gently as he could. Boys

are not naturally as gentle as girls, but Sooty could tell he was kind-hearted by his nice brown eyes.





The little kitten sat quite still

The little kitten sat quite still with her head on one side, just watching him and trembling a little. She trembled because everything was strange, not because she felt frightened any longer.

Dick reached her and lifted her from the branch by her neck. This is the best way of lifting a small kitten.



She spread out her claws and felt very scared indeed. Poor Sooty trembled like a leaf and tried hard to escape as he swung her down toward him. When he put her against his coat she clung so tightly that she ran her claws into his skin.

“Ouch! I’m not a pin cushion, kitty,” said Dick.

Below him the girls laughed because they always thought that everything their brother said was very wonderful and clever.

Dick climbed carefully down. He managed cleverly with one hand while he held Sooty with the other.



He had hardly set foot on the ground before Poppy had jumped toward him and taken the clinging kitten from his coat and clasped her lovingly in her arms.

In her eagerness, Edna forgot to hold Jack any longer. He came leaping and barking and jumping so roughly that he nearly knocked Poppy down. Poor Sooty was almost scared to death.

But Poppy held the kitten high up in the air over her head to keep her out of Jack's reach and she got her wrist scratched by Sooty's little claws.

Then Dick caught Jack again and held him tight; while the girls petted and stroked the frightened kitten until she was quite calm again. They took her through the orchard and across the farm yard where the hens were clucking and the turkey strutting around in the mellow sunshine of that late summer afternoon.

Dick had taken Jack into the side yard so that he would not again frighten the kitten.

“Look, look, Mummy!” cried the little girls as they hurried into the big farm kitchen, eager to show Mother their treasure. Children who have good mothers always want to share all their pleasures with them as well as to tell them about their troubles.

Mother was making biscuits for supper, while Leah, the maid, was ironing at the other end of the room.

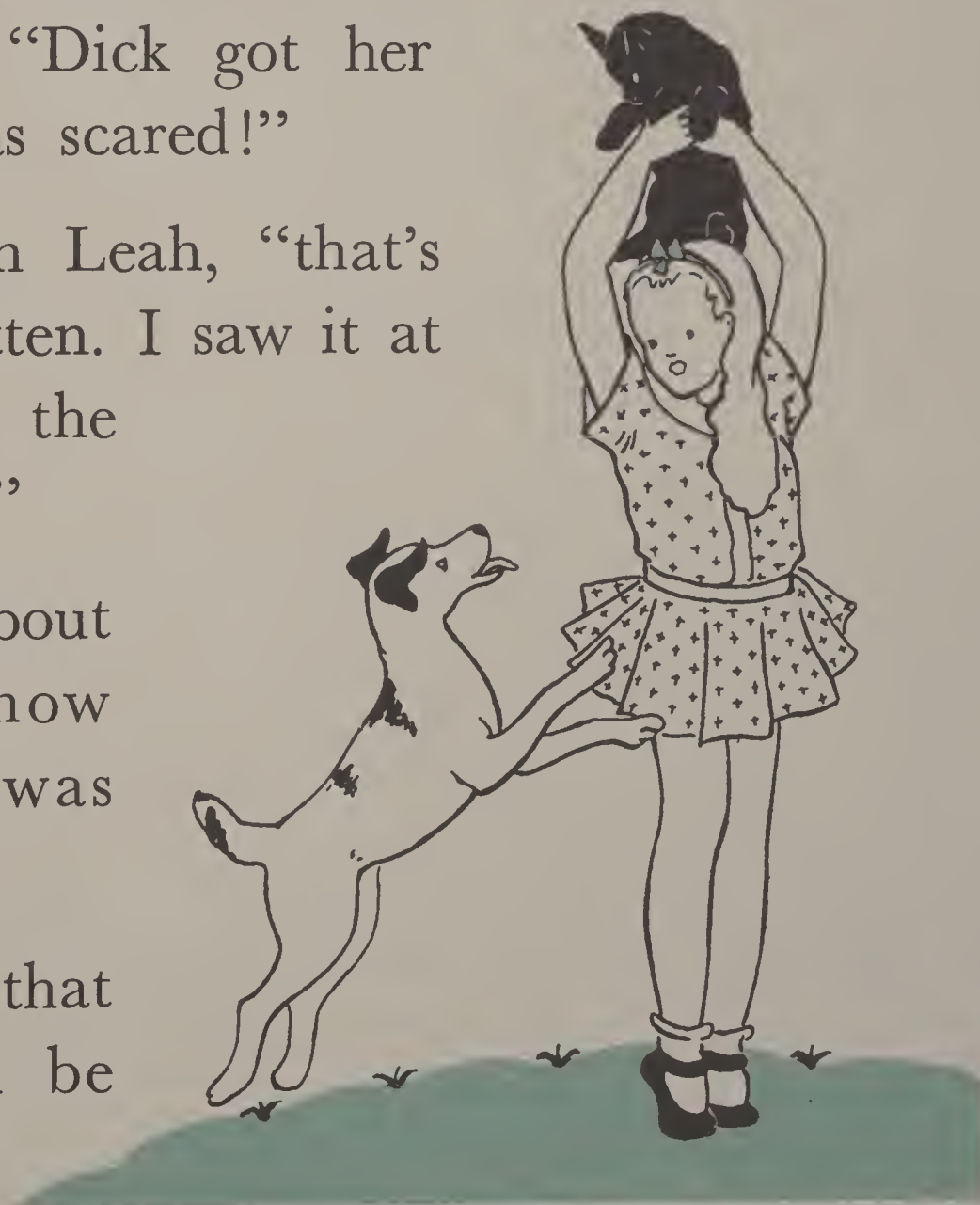
“Why, what a sweet little kitten! It is like a little black gnome,” said Mother as she stroked Sooty’s soft fur. “Where did you find her?”

“She was climbing a tree in the orchard,” said Edna. “Dick got her down. My, but she was scared!”

“Lor’ mum,” put in Leah, “that’s old Miss Robinson’s kitten. I saw it at her house when I took the eggs over last Monday.”

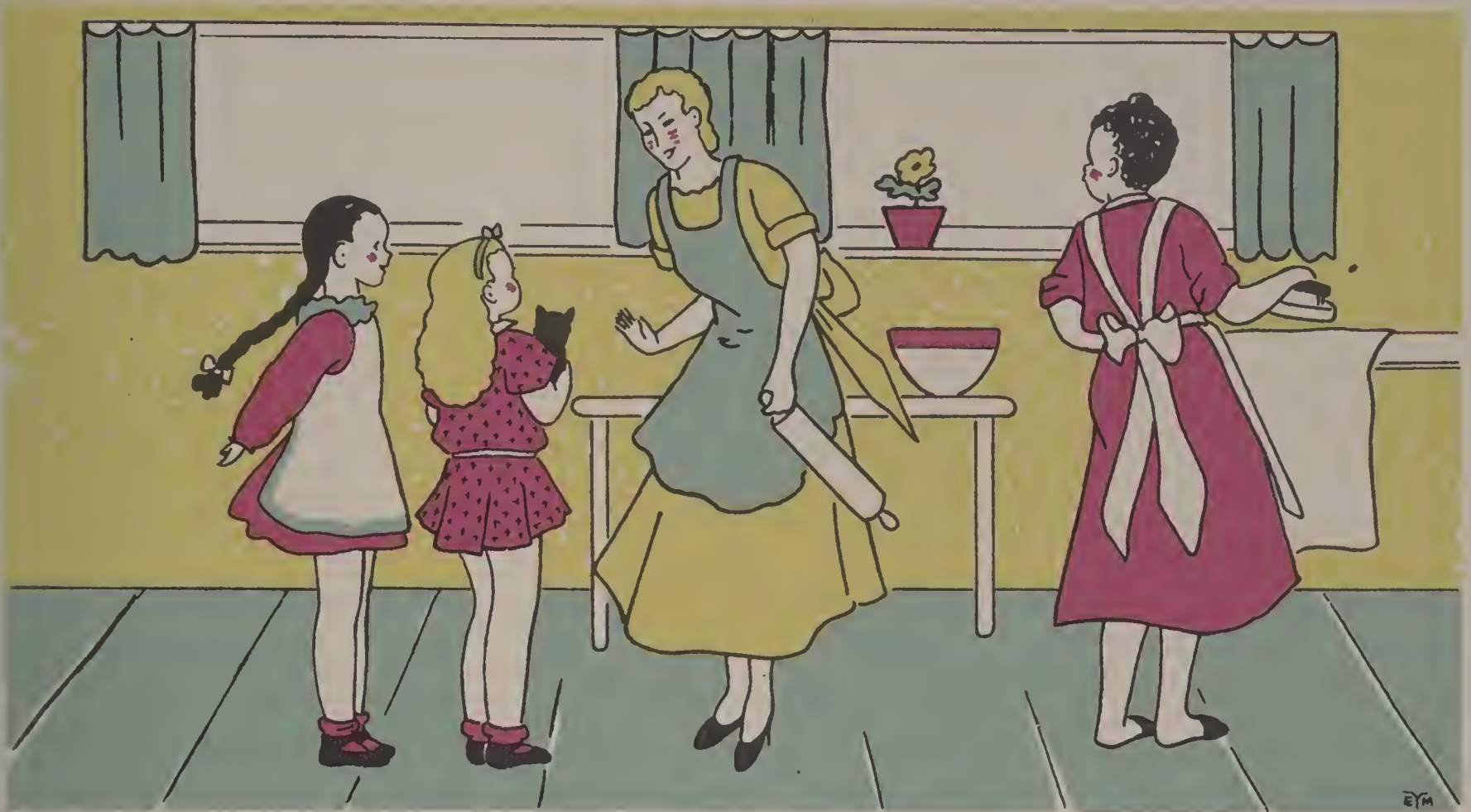
The children knew about Miss Robinson and how very particular she was about everything.

Mother was sure that Miss Robinson would be worried about Sooty.





They took her through the orchard



“Well,” said Mother, “when we have given her a bit of meat and a saucer of milk, you girls and Dick can take her back to Miss Robinson.”

“Oh!” cried Poppy. “Can’t we keep her and play with her just a little bit?”

“Well,” said Mother, “just for a little while, but not for long. Miss Robinson will be hunting and hunting for her and thinking that perhaps something has happened to her.”

So they gave Sooty some meat and a little milk which she enjoyed very much. Then they played with her. This she enjoyed even more because little animals are like little children and like to have companions to share their games and pleasures.

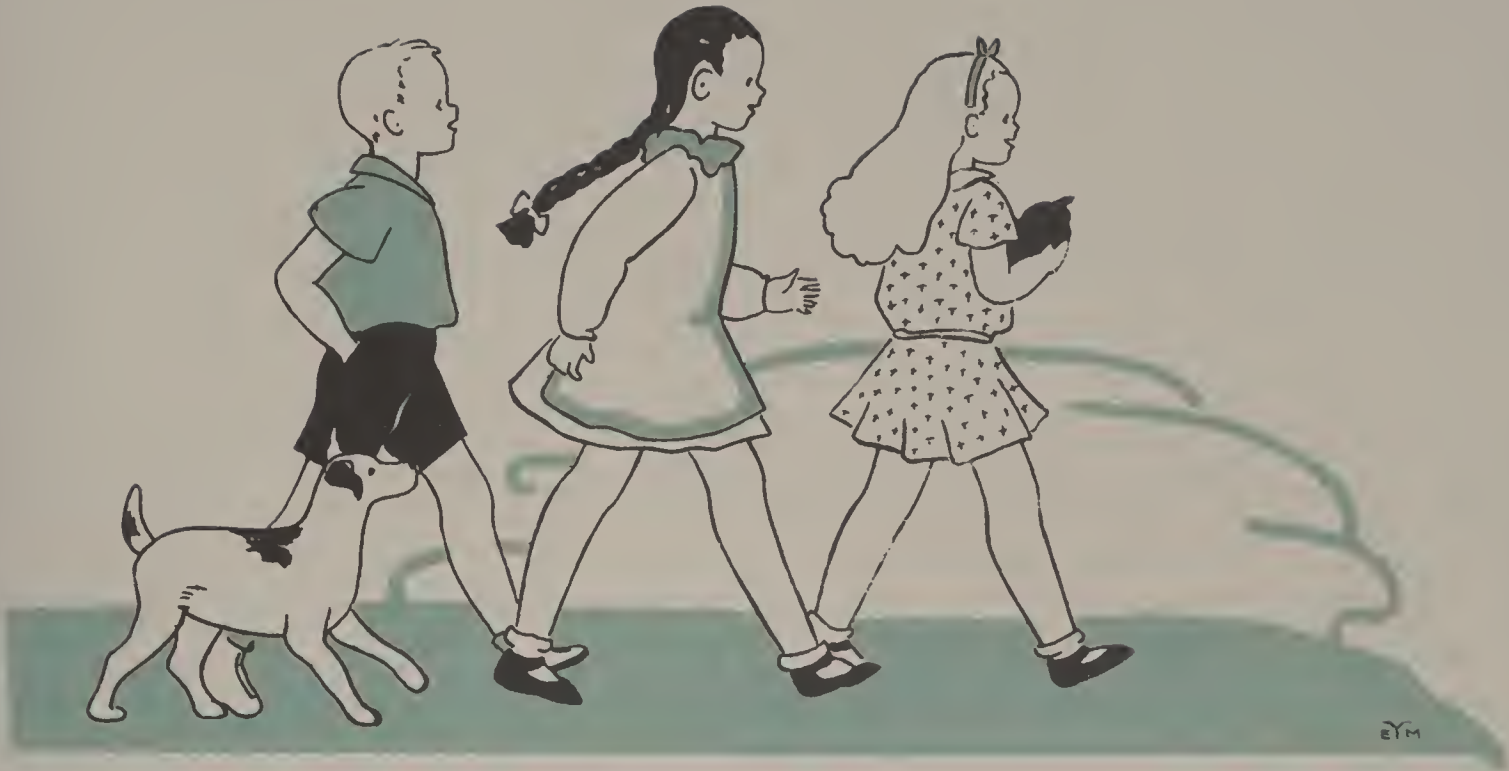


Then the girls called Dick and Jack, and all of them took Sooty back along the lane to Miss Robinson who hugged and kissed Sooty and thanked the children very heartily for taking such good care of her.

Miss Robinson asked them to come in, but she looked so anxiously from their dirty boots to her spotless carpet that they politely said, "No thank you." They had heard Leah speak a lot about how particular Miss Robinson was.

So Edna and Poppy asked her if they might call some day and see Sooty again. They went home quite happy when she said that they could.

In the meantime the three children eagerly awaited the time when they could return to see little Sooty once more.



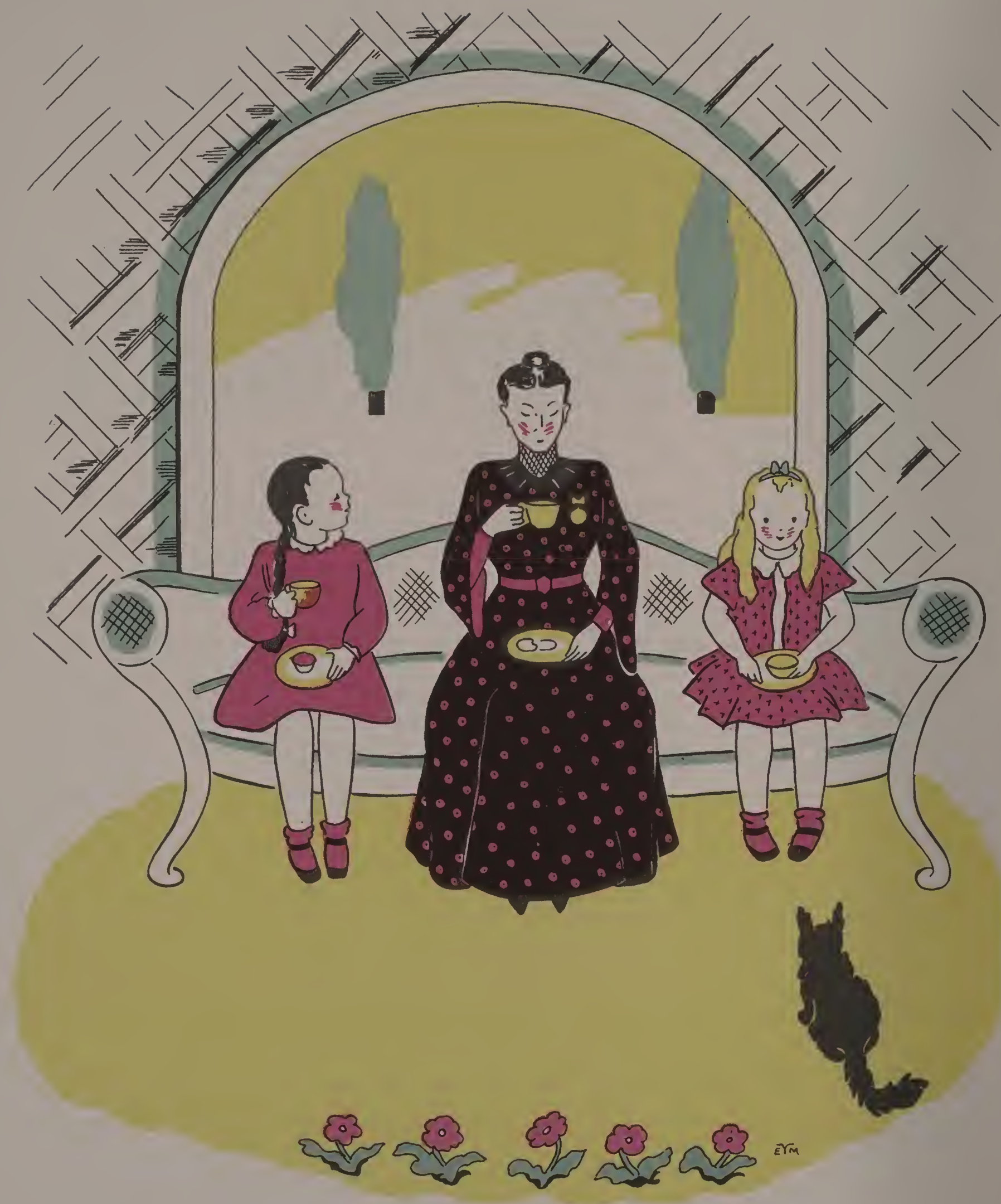
In about a week they called on Miss Robinson who gave them cake and fruit punch in the garden. She was afraid they might drop a crumb on her carpet if she took them indoors.

Sooty was so happy that she tried to follow them home when it was time for them to go.

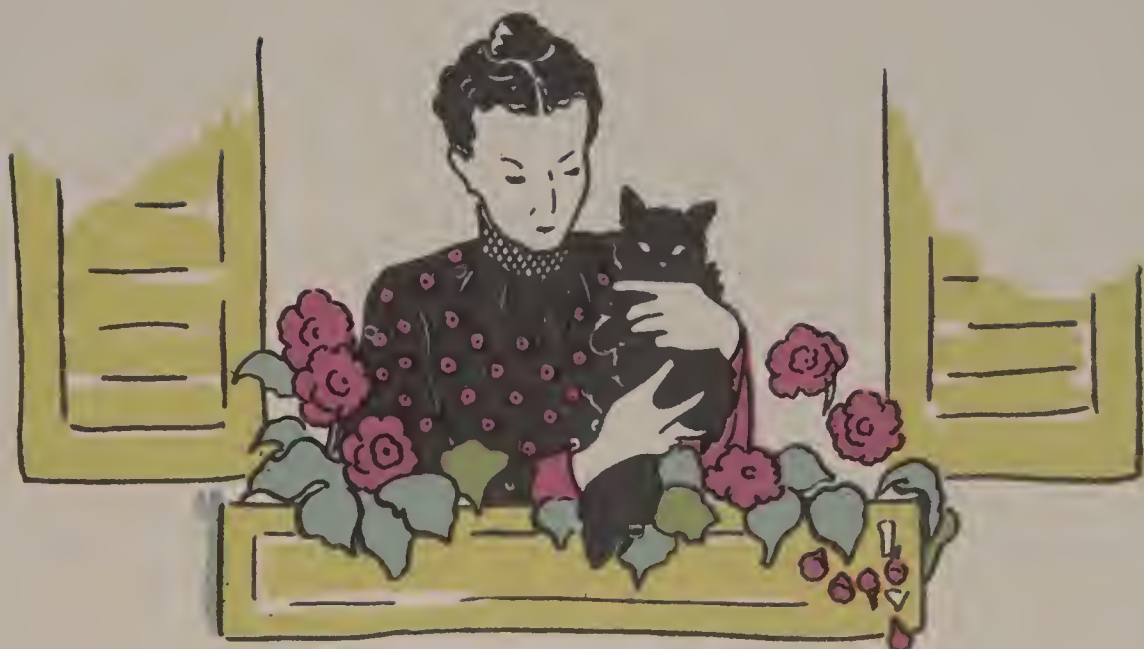
One day when Sooty had not seen the children for several days, she ran away the very moment that Miss Robinson let her out for her morning airing.

Just as soon as Sooty was away from the house she went directly to Farmer Jones' house to see her friends.

Sooty had grown to love the children so much that she could not bear to be away from them.



Miss Robinson gave them cake and fruit punch



Miss Robinson guessed where she had gone the moment she missed her from the lawn. Feeling rather vexed, she went up the lane to Farmer Jones' house. She told Mrs. Jones rather crossly that she liked to keep her kitten at home.

"Well, Miss Robinson," said Mrs. Jones gently, "it is only natural that she should like to be with the children. Kittens have to have companions you know, just like people. Why don't you get another kitten for Sooty to play with? Then maybe she would stay at home."

But Miss Robinson said she thought that it would be too much work for her to look after two kittens. Then she picked up Sooty and took her home alone.

The very next day when Miss Robinson opened the door to take her letters from the mailman, out ran the kitten again.

Again Sooty knew just where she wanted to go as soon as she was free.

She went straight to Farmer Jones' house. When Miss Robinson, very cross and annoyed, went over after her, Sooty ran off to the orchard and climbed up a tree. She climbed so high that even Dick could not get to her.

The children called and called and Miss Robinson was very angry. Mother and the children all felt very much inclined to laugh to think what a lot of trouble one tiny kitten was giving.



Soon the darkness began to come. Mother asked Miss Robinson to stay to supper and promised that Farmer Jones would try to get Sooty down when he came home about eight o'clock.

When it was quite dark they all called and called again. But Sooty just answered "meow" to let them know that she was still there. They could see her big eyes, gleaming yellow, high up in the branches. Poppy said she was sure that she could see a wicked smile in them.



But Sooty stayed up in the tree all night, and poor Miss Robinson had to go home without the kitten. All night she worried and worried, fearing that Sooty would fall asleep in the tree and perhaps tumble out and be hurt.

Miss Robinson thought too how ungrateful Sooty was to run away like that when she was given such lovely food and so much petting and such a beautiful bed at home.

In the morning Sooty had to come down because she was so hungry. When the Jones children had taken her back to Miss Robinson, she said that she would lock up the kitten to teach her to stay at home. The children felt very sorry but they could do nothing about it.

So back through the orchard the three children went to their home, wondering how Sooty was going to get along.



Sooty ran off and climbed up a tree

So Sooty was put in the attic where she could not come downstairs at all. Miss Robinson gave her plenty to eat and drink and a nice cushion to lie on, but she did not pet her as much as usual. She hoped Sooty would feel that she had been naughty and would not try to run away again.



Poor Sooty stayed in the attic for a whole week, a very long time for a kitten. After the first two or three days she wouldn't eat her food or drink her milk. Miss Robinson said that she was just sulking.

Soon however Sooty became quite sick. Her little pink nose was very hot, and all she would do was to lie on the cool attic floor and pant.

Then Miss Robinson called in Farmer Jones who understood quite a lot about animals. He looked at poor Sooty and felt her and shook his head.



“She’s a very sick cat, ma’am,” he said. “I should take her into the garden and let her stay in the fresh air. I’ll go home and send my boy Dick down with some herb medicine for her.”

And home he went, feeling very sorry for poor Sooty and thinking what a sad thing it was to be an animal who had to belong to a selfish person like Miss Robinson.

Farmer Jones told his family how sick Sooty was and the children were so sorry that Edna and Poppy cried. Even Dick felt a big lump in his throat. When the medicine was made, the little girls begged their mother to let them walk over to Miss Robinson’s with their brother.

“Just to see her,” Edna said.

“Couldn’t we, Mother?” begged Poppy. “We won’t tease her or annoy Miss Robinson, and maybe Sooty will feel better if we just pet her and tell her how much we love her.”

“Yes, let them go,” said Farmer Jones who knew just how they were feeling.

Miss Robinson opened the door for the children and asked them all to come in. She felt so sad and worried about Sooty that she did not remember to ask them if their shoes were clean.

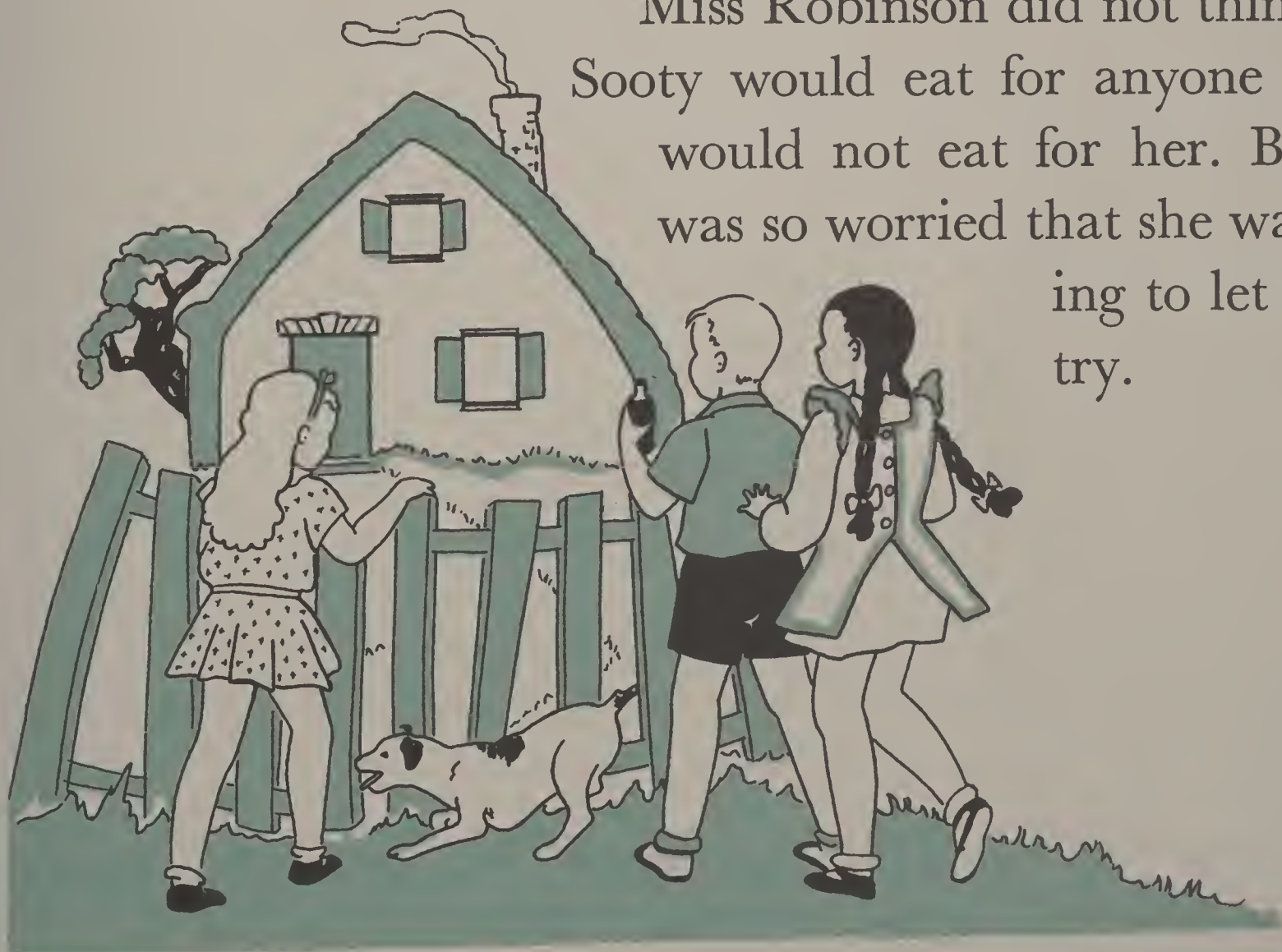
“Here’s the medicine,” Dick said.

“Oh please, can’t we see Sooty?” cried Poppy and Edna together. “We won’t worry her and—”

“She is in the garden,” said Miss Robinson, wiping her eyes. “I am afraid it will worry her to see you. She is so very sick. I can’t get her to eat a thing.”

“Oh,” said Poppy, “let me try to feed her. She often came on my lap at home and ate bits of meat out of my fingers.”

Miss Robinson did not think that Sooty would eat for anyone as she would not eat for her. But she was so worried that she was willing to let Poppy try.





So Poppy hurried out to the back lawn and before one second had passed, she had Sooty on her lap while Edna and Dick looked on. They both knew better than to start petting her at once. Miss Robinson noticed this with some surprise.

“Dear little Sooty,” said Poppy softly. “We have come to see you. Look at us, Sooty.”

And Sooty snuggled down into Poppy’s arms and started to purr like a little boiling pot. Dick gave her the herb medicine with a little glass dropper, and Miss Robinson brought out some bread and milk.

Sooty ate it out of Poppy’s fingers and seemed so much better that Miss Robinson did what she had never done before. She kissed all the children and asked them to stay to supper. Dick didn’t enjoy the kiss much, but he thought the supper was just wonderful.

Father came down to fetch them when he found how late it was getting and he said that Sooty was already lots better.

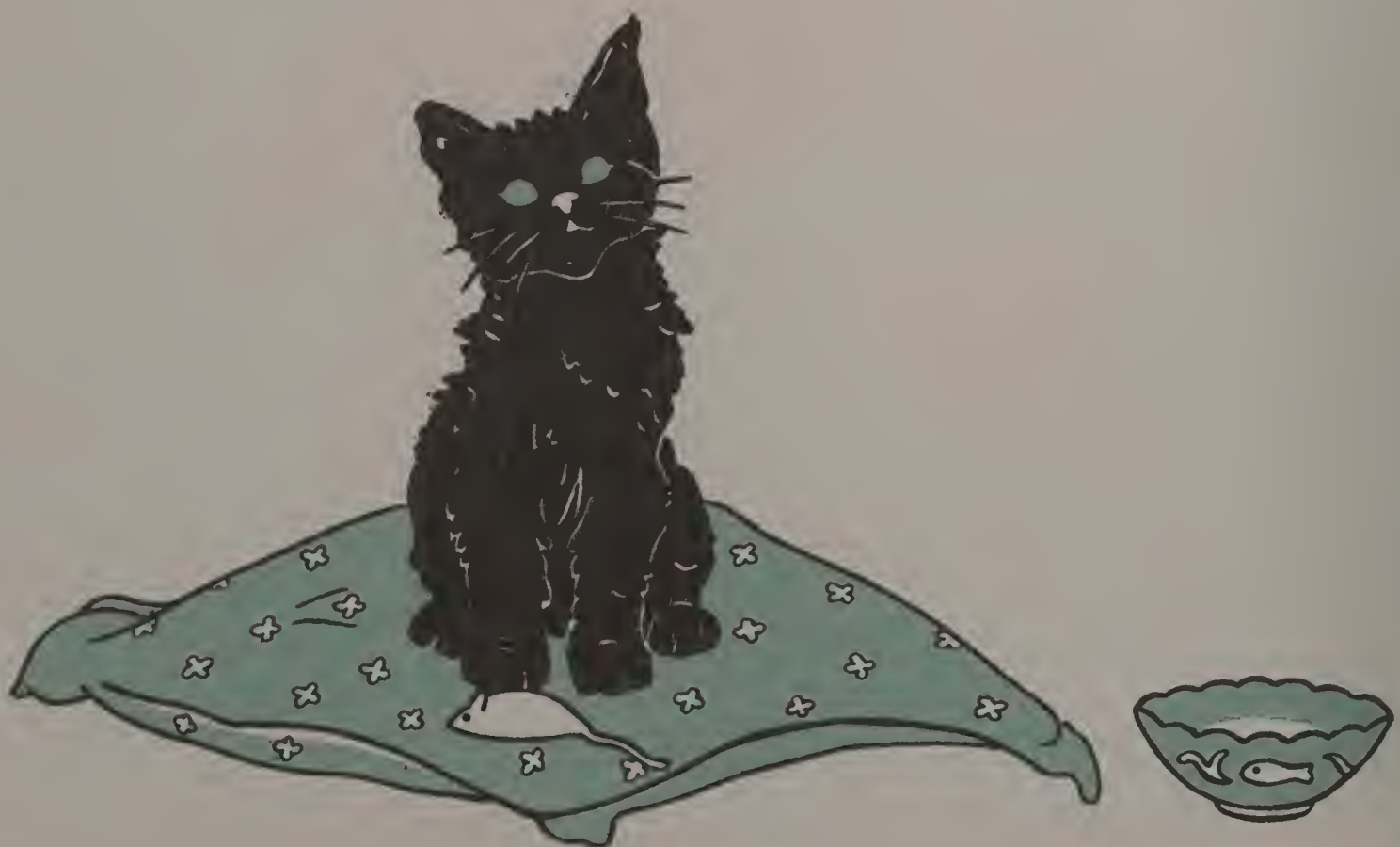


“Dear little Sooty, we have come to see you.”

Miss Robinson asked the children to come again the next day. Indeed they came every day until Sooty was quite well.

And so Miss Robinson found that children weren't anything to be afraid of after all; and that if she wanted to make a little animal healthy and happy and to have it love her, she must let it have something that it likes and not only what she herself wanted it to have.

Certain it is that Sooty grew very fond of Miss Robinson. And the children, even Dick, learned to like her too. Leah often said that Miss Robinson seemed much happier than she had ever been before because the children and Sooty kept her too alive to let her worry over her carpets.







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